

HABS No.

NC-270

Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin Law Office
Burnside, Cameron Park
Hillsborough
Orange County
North Carolina

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68-HILBO
17A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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Historic American Buildings Survey

Name of Structure - Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin's Law Office

Address - Burnside, Hillsborough, Hillsborough Township, Orange County, North Carolina
(adjacent to the eastern boundary of the town of Hillsborough)

Present Owner - Miss Rebecca B. Wall
Heartsease, 113 E. Queen St.
Hillsborough, N. C.

Present Occupant - Vacant

Present Use - Used as a storage house.

Brief Statement of Significance - Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin (1787-1870) was one of North Carolina's most eminent jurists and served as Chief Justice of the N. C. Supreme Court from 1833 to 1852. He served again as Justice from 1858 to 1860. He came to Hillsborough as a young man on June 9, 1809; and it may be that he built the Law Office before he received a deed for the land in 1811. Students came to Hillsborough to read law with him before his removal to the Haw Fields in 1830. Later, the estate and the law office pass into the possession of Ruffin's son-in-law, Paul Carrington Cameron; and it has been in the possession of the Cameron family ever since. The original tract of land was part of James Hogg's purchase.

Date of Erection - Probably ca. 1812; various persons have suggested an earlier date because of certain details of construction.

Architect - Probably none. The typical Hillsborough law office is very similar to some of the secondary houses at Williamsburg. There are several fine examples of law offices still standing in Hillsborough.

Builder, suppliers, etc. - Thomas Ruffin's Negro servants probably built it at his direction.

Original Plan, Construction, etc. - The one-room frame law office with a high pitched roof, heated by a single fireplace, is typical of the Hillsborough area. This one is simpler and smaller than most, possibly because Ruffin was just beginning when it was built. There is an excavation under it. The high foundation is of the rubble stone of the area as is the 9'8" chimney breast and fireplace; there are grilled vents (wooden) in the foundation openings. The office has two windows on both north and south sides; the fireplace chimney is in the west wall. The outside dimensions of the office are 18'8" x 14'2". The windows are 9/9 and the 3' x 6'8" entrance door has 6 panels. All framing and trim are of pine; all masonry except the 9' chimney stack (of brick) is of the native field stone or rubble. The floor is of random width pine boards with the hearth of native flagstone. The original boarded weatherboarding is on the house.

Physical History:

Original and Subsequent Owners:

1. (June 7, 1754) - John Earl Granville granted a 663 acre tract to his agent, William Churton. This deed is not filed in Orange County but is recorded in the Land Grant Office in Raleigh.
2. Sept. 9, 1754 (Deed Book 2, 128) - William Churton deeds the 663 acre tract (one record says 653 acres) to Francis Corbin for 5 pounds sterling "except 400 acres laid off for a town by the name of Orange."

3. _____, 1777 (Deed not reg. until 1780) - Edmund (Edwin) Corbin, Esq., heir of Col. Francis Corbin sells the 253 acre tract, remaining from the grant, to James Hogg. Hogg had great difficulty in verifying Francis Corbin's signature but the deed was finally proved in May, 1780. This tract, lying immediately east and northeast of the town of Hillsborough is approximately square in shape and includes the present estates of Burnside, Sans Souci, and Montrose.
4. Feb. 21, 1794 (or 1790?) (DB 5, 131) - James Hogg sells to Cullen Pollock (or Pollok) of New Bern "43 acres more or less...with all the Houses and appurtenances therunto belonging" for 400 pounds.
5. Will of Cullen Pollock, filed in New Bern, devises house and 43 acre tract to his nephew George Pollock after the death of his wife.
6. Jan. 3, 1811 (DB 16, 104-105) - George Pollock of New Bern, nephew of Cullen Pollock, sells the 43 acres to Thomas Ruffin of Orange County for \$1250.00. Only a "Garden" and a "Garden Hedge" are specifically mentioned. (Presumably Ruffin built the Law Office soon after this date.)
7. Paul C. Cameron, Thomas Ruffin's son-in-law, bought the 43 acre tract about 1854 and paid Ruffin for it, but Ruffin never conveyed the tract legally and properly to Paul C. Cameron.
8. Will of Thomas Ruffin (April 16, 1865; proved Feb., 1870) - Will Book H, 27) - "Mr. Paul C. Cameron purchased from me several years past the piece and parcel of land adjoining the town of Hillsborough on which he resides, being the residuc of the land conveyed to me by George Pollock.....therefore I do hereby devise the same to the said Paul C. Cameron in fee simple....."
9. Will of Paul C. Cameron (Feb. 28, 1890; proved Jan. 17, 1891) - (Will Book H, 512) - Item 5 in an extremely lengthy will leaves Burnside (named by Paul C. Cameron) to his wife, Anne Ruffin Cameron, for life and then to his daughter, Mildred C. Cameron, for life, then to his grandson Paul Cameron Graham in fee simple.
10. Aug. 5, 1907 (DB 60, 178) - Paul Cameron Graham and his wife, Courtenay (or Courtney) Graham of Durham, sell Burnside to Bennehan Camcron for \$10,000. (Three smaller adjacent tracts or town lots are included.)
11. April 7, 1925 (DB 86, 4) - Bennehan Cameron and Sallie M. Cameron sell Burnside to Mrs. Annie Cameron Collins Wall for "\$5,000 and other valuable considerations." (The same three small tracts are included).
12. Will of Mrs. Annie Cameron Collins Wall (Nov. 8, 1938; proved April 13, 1942) - Will Book L, 396 - Section 1 leaves all her property to her daughters, Sarah W. Wall Heartt and Rebecca B. Wall, the survivor to inherit the other's share. Sarah W. Wall Heartt died in 1951.
13. Miss Rebecca B. Wall now owns Burnside. Thomas Ruffin's Law Office stands on the lawn at Burnside.

Notes on Alterations and Additions: There have been no alterations of any consequence. Wooden steps have been replaced from time to time, and the roof has been replaced. Otherwise, the Law Office stands as it was originally built.

Historical Events Connected with Structure: The Law Office was built and occupied by North Carolina's greatest Chief Justice. Many of the students who came there to read law became eminent jurists in the North Carolina Bar.

Important Old Views: None of great ago.
(Location)

Sources of Information: (1) Orange County, N. C., Deed Books and Will Books in the (Location) Orange County Courthouse, Hillsborough, N. C.; (2) A set of 4 measured drawings of the Law Office made by Wayne Koontz and Glenn Buff of the School of design, State College, Raleigh, N. C. (The Hillsborough Historical Society has a set of these drawings on file.); (3) The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, ed. J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton (Raleigh, N. C. Historical Commission, 4 vols., 1918-1920), passim. (4) Paper on "The History of Burnside", prepared by William H. Heartt with the aid of James Webb Cheshire and John Graham Webb. (5) Architectural notes from John W. Carr, Hillsborough Historical Society.